

# THE POCAHONTAS TIMES

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Hearken unto the battle of Duncan's Lane. The story of that battle has never been printed before. It is ignored by all histories of the war. Until late years it was not a subject of frank and open discussion by the people of this county. Time cures all things. There are still living a number of men who participated in that fight, and I have talked with men on both sides recently and after so long a time this historic event which had been so nebulous came out clear and distinct and I will endeavor to state the case.

At the West Union school house at the foot of the mountain, on the road that leads to the Williams River country, in 1861, Henry Duncan, in a double log house on the headwaters of Stony Creek. The house was opposite the mouth of the draw or hollow leading off at right angles toward the south, and up that hollow lived William Beverage about a quarter of a mile distant. The way was used up that hollow to reach the Griffin place, and the homes of people living on Days Mountain, and on over the headwaters of Dry Run, a branch of Swago Creek. Part of the passway between the Duncan place and the Beverage place was fenced on both sides in 1864 as a lane. It was this lane that gave the name to the battle.

The state was formed in 1861, and in the early part of 1864 a regiment of state guards was formed at Buckhannon, and of this regiment Pocahontas county furnished one company, captained at times by Captain Sam Young, a minister, and later by Captain I. W. Allen. Captain Young preached at the sulphur spring on Stony Creek, (Ellis Sharp's) on May 3, 1864, and made an appointment to preach there again forty days later. A great concourse of people gathered there in 1864 to keep the appointment, but the captain was dead. Eleven survivors appeared at the meeting.

This regiment had its headquarters in 1864 at Beverly. These state guards were gallant soldiers and were exposed to all the perils and privations of the civil war. It is too much to say that they performed service attended by unusual dangers and hazards, and it is a matter of general regret that they were not recognized and rewarded by the Federal government after the war, for however home guards in uninhabited states were placed those in West Virginia were real soldiers.

In 1864, the Union depended upon the result of the presidential election, as a peace party had set out to defeat the election of Lincoln, and if this had succeeded the erring sisters would have been allowed to go to peace, and the United States would have disintegrated.

The dauntless Averell and his mounted infantry, like a lion in the flesh, and a ranking fire to the Confederates, had conquered and subdued West Virginia for the Union. He was ignominiously discharged in September 1864. The county of Pocahontas in the fall of 1864 was controlled by the Confederacy. It was determined however by the West Virginia authorities to hold an election for President in this county, and arrangements were made to open the polls at Eddy. And the Pocahontas county state guards company was detailed to bring that election off. They marched on foot from Beverly to Eddy, a distance of fifty-four miles, coming in by the way of Elk River, and arriving a day or two before election. It was recognized that it was a dangerous expedition, sending one company into Pocahontas county.

The company camped near the headwaters of Elk on the way by and one of the soldiers, Washington Neff, obtained leave of absence to visit his wife who was stopping at William Gibson's. Here he was captured by a squad belonging to Captain J. C. Gay's company of Confederate scouts, and was taken as a prisoner to the headquarters of that company, at the farm of Samuel Gay just above the mouth of Stony Creek. That night in attempting to escape, Neff was shot and killed. The prisoner had laid out Private Bennett with a stone and had been shot as he fled near the ford in Stony Creek.

This word had reached the company at Eddy. Captain Sam Young was in command. Capt. I. W. Allen was there too. Nearly every member of the company was a Pocahontas man. Already apprehensive of the danger of being in the heart of a Confederate county, the death of Neff must have impressed them with the dangers of their position. The polls were opened under the oaks standing in front of the William Sharp house, near the big spring. The soldiers all voted irrespective of age and number of citizens of the vicinity, and the vote was solid for Abraham Lincoln for President.

Aaron Moore was chosen as the messenger to take the vote into the northwestern part of the State, where the existence of the government of West Virginia was recognized, and the company of soldiers prepared to act as his guard. William Hannan was one of the commissioners of election but he had the uniform of a soldier. It was decided not to attempt to return by the pike to Beverly, the road now called Seneca Trail. The return was to be made by crossing the river at Martins Bottom, by Huntersville, and the Hill country, by Dunmore and Greenbank to the Staunton and Parkersburg pike at Travelers Rest and across Cheat Mountain. The company marched four miles south to Marlinton and when they came in sight of the bridge they saw a Confederate soldier at the end of the bridge on horseback. This soldier saw the Union soldiers at the same time and whistled his horse and galloped back through the bridge. This was construed to mean that he was a picket and that he had gone to notify southern cavalry of the advance of

the northern soldiers. Upon a council of war it was decided to take to the mountain and make a detour in the direction of Williams River in such a way that cavalry could not follow them. They realized that they were a small company of men in a country that was hostile to them, and that they might be killed by an ambushed force at any minute.

It turned out afterwards that the soldier at the bridge was not a sentinel, but was a deserter who was making his getaway to Buckhannon, and they saw him a short time after. The little army turned up Price Run and crossed the Cheat Mountain through the grass lands until they reached the fringe of trees near the top, and there they took some cold feet from their haversacks and lay down to sleep without any fire whatever.

They were stirring before daylight and marched to the head of Dry Run and called at the house of Peter Beverage, a Union man, and there got something to eat and then proceeded by the way of the Griffin place, to William Beverage's place. William Beverage was a brother of Peter Beverage, but was a Confederate in sympathy, but was not a combatant.

Here there were bees, and the little army feeling safe from possible pursuit, commanded a bee gun or hive full of honey. It was the first week of November and the hive was nearly with honey. The soldiers made the farmer give them buckets and they proceeded to fill the buckets with honey, preparing for a mid-day feed.

In the meantime, the Confederates had been laying plans to capture the Union soldiers sent here in such a small force to beard the lion in his den. Captain J. C. Gay, holding a commission as captain under the Confederacy with authority to guard the border was the ranking officer in this emergency, he augmented his force by summoning to his headquarters at his home at the mouth of Stony Creek, all southern soldiers who were at home on furlough, and his company was made up of about half scouts and half soldiers on furlough.

Godfrey Geiger says that he and his brother Adam Geiger were called from their home at Stony Bottom and that they reached headquarters at the Gay farm about dark on the day of the election.

The company was made up there, and moved before daylight the next morning, and took the trail of the Union soldiers on Bucks Mountain and found where they had bivouacked in the edge of the woods. They then went to William Kinnison's on the mountain to get some bread but before any could be prepared they heard the northern soldiers picket firing at Peter Beverage's near by and they did not wait for anything to eat.

They hung on the trail slowly which led through the woods for the most part, until they came to the open grass land around William Beverage's and there they saw the Union soldiers in the act of taking the honey from a bee hive. The distance was about three hundred yards. The order to firing given, a volley was let off, the result of which was a general scattering of the blue coats for shelter. Some went to the hillside on either side of the hollow. Some went down Duncan's Lane, and sheltered in and behind Duncan's house and some to the knoll commanding the mouth of the hollow where West Union school house stands and in this way gave battle and returned the firing.

Aaron Moore with the election, returns ran up the hillside, and Godfrey Geiger says that he would most certainly been killed if it had not been that he was in citizen clothes, the rule being to shoot no one not in uniform.

At or about the first fire, Bernard Sharp, of the Union army, a son of William Sharp, of Elk, and a brother of Silas, Harmon, and Hugh Sharp, fell mortally wounded. He was shot through both hips. Godfrey Geiger says that he was carrying an army gun called a musketoon, which took a paper cartridge. That he went into the fight with three charges and that he would have been out of the battle but for the fact that he got a supply of cartridges from the battlefield after the first volley, after which an ammunition just suttling his gun. Godfrey Geiger says that his was a long range gun, and that he saw Captain Young in the passage way between the two parts of the Duncan house and that he shot at him. That Captain Young told him afterwards that the ball cut away his clothes across his chest. The bullet was recovered after the war from the log where it had lodged.

The two little armies having taken shelter continued to fire at each other for something like an hour and a half, and neither side making a charge, the Union soldiers gradually withdrew and made their way by little squads to the original rendezvous at Beverly taking with them the result of the election. When it became apparent that the Union army had retired from the place, the Confederates went on down the lane, and came on Bernard Sharp, and carried him to Henry Duncan's house. It was apparent that he was near death, but they sent for a doctor and did what they could for him, but he expired in a few hours.

The Union soldiers wounded were T. S. McNeel, F. F. McLaughlin, M. McNEEL & M. LAUGHLIN INSURANCE Fire, Life, Health, Accident, Automobile, Live Stock and Bonds. REAL ESTATE AGENTS Town and Country Property, only licensed agents in the County. Money to loan on farms. Your business solicited.

John Armstrong, Moffett Walton, John E. Adkison, William Kinnison, James L. Rodgers, received serious wounds. Moffett Sharp, shot in the mouth.

J. R. Moore, who was under fire from the first, said that no one was hit at the first fire, that is the firing that occurred while the Union soldiers were getting the honey for lunch. William Beverage said I think this is correct. I think Bernard Sharp was hit in the lips with a mountain rifle ball while he stood behind a tree returning the fire of the Confederates. He was a fine, tall, slim young man, and his untimely death was greatly regretted.

The wounded soldiers were taken to a cave near James McClure's, under the shadow of E. B. Kinnison, who concealed, and they were treated with great kindness and consideration by the McClure family. They were shot in the Confederate side. The Confederates turned back at Henry Duncan's and they took from his farm a bee gun, and bees which they carried to William Beverage to replace the one that he had lost to the Union army. There were no other men on the farm other than Duncan was for the Union, and Beverage was for the Confederacy.

I have talked with Register Moore and Peter McCarty, soldiers of the Union, on one side and Godfrey Geiger, soldier on the other side. Godfrey Geiger was in some of the biggest fighting of the war. George McColman was eight years old and he has a vivid recollection of the soldiers returning from the battlefield, shouting and victorious. He was at his Aunt Ruth Keen on Bucks Mountain, George M. Keen, a wounded Confederate soldier being at home. It is probably impossible for complete lists of the names of the soldiers obtained at this late day and time, and the names here given are those furnished by survivors of the affair.

Union soldiers: Captain Samuel Young, Captain I. W. Allen, Lieut. Wm. Kinnison, Corporal John Armstrong, William Harlan, George Gay, George Cochran, Clark Dillie, Edwin Battery, Jeremy Dille, Shilton Hannah, Clark Kellison, Newton Wainnes, Moffett Wainnes, James L. Rodgers, Aaron Moore, J. B. Moore, Henry Pugh, William Simmons, John E. Adkison, Peter McCarty, James Ritter, Aaron Keen, Columbus Silva, Henry Sharp, George McKeever, Moffett Rodgers, Hanson Moore, and Moffett Sharp.

Confederate soldiers: Captain J. C. Gay, James Shannon, Jacob Simmons, Michael Willerton (one armed soldier), William Geiger, Azri White, Bax White, Charles L. Moore, Mathias Moore, James McLaughlin, George H. McLaughlin, Charles Jackson, Jacob Beverage, Glover Creek, Harvey Lindsay, Geo. Simmons, Hiram Dorman.

There can be no question but that there are many names omitted on both sides. It was not a battle that would be reported in the walls to the war office of either country. Although I have known the most of the soldiers mentioned above intimately, it was not a case that was discussed freely in the older days. It was only when the story of this battle was about to be lost to history that I gathered some of the salient facts in connection with it, and fortunately I was able to talk to soldiers who had been in it.

As a battle it does not rank high in the national issue to be decided other than it had a direct bearing on the election of Lincoln the second time. If he had been defeated, it would have been a long farewell to the greatness of America. But it was not in the plan of Providence for him to fall.

As a part of the travail of West Virginia, the birth throes such contests as these, occurring in the border counties, are of the greatest importance. I have never been able to understand why the home guards of West Virginia were not pensioned and rewarded like the rest of the volunteer army. To belong to a state guard company in West Virginia and preserve the sanity of the state and to assist in every military movement within the borders of the state, was a service of the greatest peril and importance.

I have heard that the troubles in the way of this recognition, was the stand that the all powerful Grand Army of the Republic organization took in the matter. And I can see how a home guard in New Hampshire, for instance, would never hear a shot fired in anger, and might have the right to as much consideration as the soldier who faces death at the call of his country. But the West Virginia state guard carried his life in his hand during the fourteen months of his active service, and many perished in the discharge of their duties.

The formation of the state guards seems to have released in a great measure the Army of West Virginia for service in the Valley of Virginia and beyond the Blue Ridge. In April, 1864, the state guards were organized and took charge of the danger zone in West Virginia, and in May, 1864, the entire force of the Army of West Virginia was at the regulars stationed in the mountain state were called to go on the move to a movement against Lynchburg, Virginia, and from that to the end of the war at Appomattox. The Army of West Virginia fought on the other side of the mountain, with the exception of a detour on a retreat from Salem to Martinsburg by way of Lewisburg and Charleston, from June 29, 1864, to July 18, 1864. The policy of West Virginia for the last year of the war was given over to the state guards, and I feel that they have not been given due credit for their courage and fidelity and efficiency. In peace they seem to have been forgotten, and their signal service ignored. They have not been treated as well as Confederate soldiers, for most of the home guard states have taken very good care of destitute southern veterans.

The home guard movement should not be confused with the lone guard companies formed on either side at the beginning of the war in the West Virginia counties. These unformed patriotic citizens represent the sentiment of their respective states, and played important parts in the earlier stages of the contest, and they all practically formed or entered regular companies.

The West Virginia guards had all the standing of regularly sworn defenders, wearing the uniform of their country duty authorized by law to lay down their lives for the Union. Unfortunately they became confused with the more peaceful organizations of other states and suffered neglect and ingratitude. Students of history are invited to study the record. They will be convinced that a very important body of Union soldiers failed to receive due recognition after peace was declared.

I am glad to be able to present to you the salient facts of the battle of Duncan's Lane, as an example of what might be expected as a part of the day's work from the West Virginia State guards who fought a good fight, and finished the course with compensation after the war was over.

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